

Boardwalk closes in on 100,000 milestone

Boardwalk

Park uses social networking
to keep interest high

By **KIMBERLY WHITE**

kwhite@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — While the world's clocks wind down to close out 2010, the Santa Cruz Boardwalk will have its own countdown — of Facebook fans.

Boardwalk spokeswoman Brigid Fuller said the amusement park aims to have 100,000 fans by the end of the year, and it's closing in rapidly on that milestone. At 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, the Boardwalk was just 250 fans shy of its goal, and by 6 p.m., that number had narrowed to 137.

In comparison, the Santa Monica Pier has 3,367 friends and Belmont Park, the only beachfront park in San Diego, has 459 friends. Disneyland's Facebook page does not have friending capability, but it does have more than 6 million "likes."

"We're definitely finding that Facebook is a great way to stay in touch with people who really like the Boardwalk and are interested in getting insider information," Fuller said.

The 103-year-old Boardwalk has been increasing its online presence — especially on social networking sites as Facebook, Twitter and the mobile phone application Foursquare — to raise its

visibility and keep fans up to date on the latest concerts, movies and other special events.

For example, the Boardwalk announced a special promotion last week aimed at ending the year with one million Giant Dipper riders. In a special that ends at 5 p.m. Friday, visitors can pay \$5 — the price of a single ride — to ride the famed wooden roller coaster as many times as they want between noon and 5 p.m.

Fuller said ridership was high Sunday and Monday, when the off-and-off again rain stopped. But the park is still about 7,000 riders short of the goal.

Donaven Staab, webmaster and Internet marketing manager for the Boardwalk's owner, Santa Cruz Seaside Company, set up the Facebook page in October 2008, but didn't start regularly posting items until about 18 months later. The Boardwalk had 25,000 fans in the spring of this year, but saw that number increase to 50,000 by summer, he said.

Staab and Fuller attribute the growing fan base in part to some of the amusement park's recent additions, including "Fun Fact Friday." Fans can read tidbits of historical information about the park, including the fact that the Loeff Carousel and Giant Dipper are both National Historic Landmarks built by members of the same family.

The site also includes a scattering of historical photographs of the Boardwalk, which was founded in 1907 and has been owned and operated by the Santa Cruz Seaside Company since 1915. Fuller said photographs are always a big draw because generations of family members can relate to the old rides.

"Here (is) a historic Santa Cruz Beach and Boardwalk photo, showing my grandfather Joseph Cullumber, with his fellow carpenters, building the Giant Dipper in 1926," one fan wrote beneath an old, black-and-white photograph showing dozens of men clustered together in front of the famous roller coaster. "My mother said she and the family camped on the beach all summer while her dad worked on the roller coaster."

However, Staab said the Boardwalk doesn't intend to use Facebook and other networking sites just as sales tools.

"Facebook is something that we're really focusing on now, but ... it's more of a news tool to get news to people about the park," he said.

For example, the 26th annual New Year's Eve's Eve Party will be from 8 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Thursday at the adjacent Cocoanut Grove Ballroom. And on Friday, Cocoanut Grove will host a classic New Year's Eve Party from 7 p.m. and 1 a.m., including a dinner buffet, dancing and entertainment.

12-29-10